

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 2987

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, LE, SY, PLO, MILI
SUBJECT: ISRAELI VIEWS ON SOUTH LEBANON

REF: BEIRUT 1918

1. WE WOULD LIKE TO ADD A FEW COMMENTS TO THOSE OF EMBASSY BEIRUT (REFTEL) ON THE ISRAELI PERCEPTIONS OF SOUTH LEBANON. ALONG WITH BEIRUT, WE SEE THE APPARENT INCONSISTENCY (NOTED IN PARA TWO REFTEL) BETWEEN ISRAELI CONCERN FOR "WHAT IS LEFT OF AN INDEPENDENT CHRISTIAN ENTITY" IN THE SOUTH AND ISRAELI SUPPORT FOR THE EFFORTS OF SARKIS TO BRING STABILITY TO ALL OF LEBANON. HOWEVER, THIS INCONSISTENCY FADES IF ONE ADOPTS THE ISRAELI HYPOTHESIS THAT MOST OF LEBANON, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF "THE SOUTH," HAS EFFECTIVELY PUT ITS INDEPENDENCE INTO COLD STORAGE WITH THE SYRIANS. PEOPLE HERE WOULD ARGUE THAT IF THE LEBANESE HAD BEEN ABLE TO MAINTAIN STABILITY WITHOUT SYRIAN INTERVENTION, THEN THE ISRAELIS WOULD NEVER HAVE FELT
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THE NEED TO SUPPORT THE SOUTH LEBANESE.

2. WE SHARE EMBASSY BEIRUT'S CONCERN (PARA THREE REFTEL) ABOUT THE LEGALITIES OF ISRAELI ACTIVITIES RELATING TO SOUTH LEBANON, BUT WOULD NOT RECOMMEND THAT THE U.S. ASSUME REPONSIBILITY FOR ALTERING THE SITUATION THERE IN VIEW OF THE LIKELY CONSEQUENCES

(THE RETURN OF PALESTINIAN TERRORISTS AND/OR SYRIAN FORCES NEAR THE ISRAELI BORDER) WHICH THE ISRAELIS HAVE MADE CLEAR THEY WOULD NOT ACCEPT. A NUMBER OF ISRAELIS (SOLDIERS, DIPLOMATS, JOURNALISTS) HAVE EXPRESSED THE VIEW TO US THAT THE GOOD FENCE IS INEVITABLY ONLY AN INTERIM MEASURE, AND THE EVENTUALLY THE GOL WILL SUCCEED IN CLOSING IT. BUT FIRST, THEY SAY, THE GOL WILL HAVE TO REASSERT ITS ABILITY TO SPEAK FOR THE LEBANESE. WE DOUBT THAT THE GOI WOULD DENY A LEBANESE GOVERNMENT'S RIGHT TO CLOSE THE BORDER-- IF IT CHOOSES TO DO SO AFTER EXERCISING ITS SOVEREIGNTY AND TAKING CONTROL OF THE SOUTH.

3. THE ISRAELIS MAY HAVE MADE A "NEW AND BROADER EXTRAPOLATION OF THE POSITION THEY TOOK IN THE NABATIYAH AFFAIR" (PARA FOUR REFTEL), IN THAT THEY ADDED THEIR OPPOSITION NOT ONLY TO ANY SOUTHWARD MOVEMENT BY SYRIAN FORCES, BUT ALSO TO SUCH MOVEMENT BY "OTHER ELEMENTS OR UNITS UNDER THEIR CONTROL," WHICH WE READ AS "SAIAQ" OR "FATAH." WHETHER OR NOT THE ISRAELIS HAVE VERBALLY BROADENED THEIR "PRINCIPLES," WE THINK THAT THEY WOULD INVEST LESS DIPLOMATIC EFFORT IN TRYING TO REMOVE FROM SOUTH LEBANON SUCH "ELEMENTS" OR "UNITS", IF IN LIMITED NUMBERS, THAN IN PREVENTING SYRIAN PENETRATION THERE. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE ISRAELI USE OF THE TERM "REAL AND AUTHENTIC LEBANESE ARMY" DOES NOT STRIKE US AS OF MUCH SIGNIFICANCE. WE THINK IT UNLIKELY THAT THE ISRAELIS WILL HAVE TO FACE THE TASK IN THE NEAR

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FUTURE OF DEFENING A REAL AND AUTHENTIC LEBANESE ARMY. IF THE LEBANESE COME TO AN AGREEMENT ON THE MATTER, THEN ISRAEL WILL PASS JUDGMENT AT THAT TIME.

4. GOI OFFICIALS WOULD PROBABLY CONCUR WITH EMBASSY BEIRUT'S POINT THAT THEY SYRIANS AND THEIR FRIENDS WOULD THEMSELVES LIKE TO CRUSH THE REJECTIONISTS/ EXTREMISTS (PARA FIVE). HOWEVER, THEY WOULD NOT BE INCLINED FOR THAT REASON (OR FOR ANY OTHER) TO LET SOUTH LEBANON "GO SYRIAN."

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